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AUTHOR Martin, M. Joan
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ABSTRACT

Counseling is an integral part of nursing, especially public health nursing. The normal day to day situations in which a public health nurse finds herself offer great potential for counselling. The technique used primarily by public health nurses is that of basic listening, which is so necessary for ascertaining and understanding situations and feelings of their clients. The quality of family functioning is the main concern of the public health nurse. The public health nurse is, above all, a generalist; in one and the same day she may serve families in which the main problems are tuberculosis, obstetrics, or the supervision of a well school child. In one and the same day a public health nurse will counsel individuals and families in homes, schools, church halls and by telephone. Prevention is the main emphasis of all public health nursing programs. A selection of these programs is briefly described, illustrating how the public health nurse uses her counseling skills. (Author)

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M. Joan Martin

DISCIPLINES IN COUNSELLING - THE PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE

Counselling is an integral part of nursing especially public health nursing.

We talk about counselling in child health conferences, prenatal counselling, nutrition counselling, counselling students in school, in fact we use the term in practically every program we describe.

Something that perhaps public health nurses do not describe too well to the public and to professional co-workers is their own background, training and role.

A public health nurse is a registered nurse with specialized qualifications who provides a continuing service to families and individuals in the community. She is a practitioner in her own right detecting cases of need on her own initiative as well as acting on referrals.

She has skills and knowledge particular to her work and these are drawn from her nursing background and the additional preparation in her public health course.

The quality of family functioning is the main concern of the public health nurse.

The public health nursing course is so arranged that the student acquires a sound knowledge of the basic principles of healthy living. It includes: study of the development of the individual at all stages of the life cycle, the home environment, the family and factors which

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promote a satisfactory home life. A working knowledge of available community services in order that the public health nurse may be able to help individuals to use them to their fullest advantage.

Thus the public health nurse is equipped to deal with the diversified groups she will come into daily contact with in the community.

The public health nurse is, above all, a generalist. In one and the same day she may serve families in which the main problems are: tuberculosis, obstetrics, or the supervision of a well school child. In one and the same day a public health nurse will counsel individuals and families in homes, schools, church halls and by telephone.

I think then it can be seen that the public health nurse is in an unique position as compared with other counsellors such as "school counsellors," "marriage counsellors," "debt counsellors," etcetera, who deal mainly with a specific group of people and who counsel mainly in their offices.

Home visiting is probably the most important part of the public health nurse's work. Traditionally, public health nurses have easy access to homes, most people have a positive approach to a nurse and trust is established very quickly.

All public health nursing programs have prevention as their main emphasis. Let us look at some public health nursing programs and see how the public health nurse uses her counselling skills.

Prenatal Classes. Listening to individual and group concerns related to pregnancy, labour and breast feeding. Helping couples formulate plans to cope with their new roles and changing family relationships, especially in the first few weeks following birth of baby.

Postnatal Visiting. Family visited as a unit. Listening to how the mother perceives the progress of her baby and herself as a mother. Re-assurance and complimenting her on her achievements. Answering questions on baby care. Helping mother work out plan for management of baby. There is no limit to the number of postnatal visits a public health nurse makes, each situation is individually considered.

Child Health Conferences. For infants and preschool children. All parents are invited to attend. Clinics are held regularly in accessible locations in the community at varying hours. Immunizations are given and time is allowed for a conference between parent and public health nurse about the baby, toddler or other family member. Public health nurse listens to parents' comments and concerns. Helps parents think through how they are going

to do things. Anticipatory guidance with reference to developmental milestones. Pertinent literature is distributed. Observation and appropriate referral as indicated to family physician, area public health nurse or other agencies.

School Health. The public health nurse is a team member concerned with the physical and emotional health of students, elementary to senior high.

Counselling individual students: nutrition, dental, personal hygiene, emotional problems. Home visits to parents of school children. Liaison between home and school. Listening to how the parents perceive the situation. Helping parents formulate plans, with reference to normal growth and development and to the altering needs of both the growing child and the parents at these various stages. These visits often promote a closer relationship between parents and the school.

Counselling Parents of Retarded Children. Parents can be aided by on-going counselling provided by public health nurses in adjusting to the problems of the family. The adjustive process, then, not only contributes to the well-being of the parents and the retarded child, but it also enhances the development of other children in the family.

Public health nurses provide an on-going service to families. How do the recipients of this service view the role of the public health nurse?

> From the standpoint of the recipient of community health nursing, perhaps the most significant role attributed to her is what Gerald Caplan has called that of a "wise older sister." This implies a commitment to the individuals being served that goes beyond casual interest or an impersonal provision of goods and services. It involves a certain amount of identification with the problems that are of concern to the patient and his family. It implies, also, a kind of claim on the part of the family for the nurse's concern, interest, and intervention of their behalf, since the relationship is not entirely one of equal exchange because of the nurse's professional preparation. The nurse's role is somewhere between that of teacher and collaborator,[1] between that of counselor and friend.

At a recent convention I attended[2] Dr. Margery King, Executive Director, Canadian Council on Children and Youth said, "Education of parents is the key to raising healthy, well-adjusted children. Emphasis must be put on preventing health and emotional problems among children, rather than on trying to cure the problems once they exist."

From this short dissertation it will be seen that the public health nurse as teacher, advisor, liaison worker and counsellor plays a key role in this vital issue.

FOOTNOTES

1. Freeman, Ruth B. Community Health Nursing Practice (Philadelphia, London, Toronto: W.G. Saunders Company, 1970), p. 40.

2. B.C. Council of Parent Participation Preschool with Parent Cooperative Preschools International: Annual Convention, Vancouver, B.C. May 9 and 10, 1975.